



School Based Teacher Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Teachers in Jaffna District

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1 INTRODUCTION

We live in a modern society where the demands placed upon teachers have become complex. Therefore, teachers should be trained in order to meet the changing needs of the society. Professional training and quality professional development activities should be available to all teachers for development of the society. In the post war context, teachers in Jaffna district face challenges when trying to improve their professional competencies in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the school activities. School based teacher development activities are important for the improvement of teachers' professional competencies and student achievement in the war affected region. A competent teacher is able to exercise effective discipline and is able to establish a positive relationship with the staff, pupils and parents. The prevailing situation of the current society in Jaffna district expect this type of positive relationship to be rebuilt among the individuals. This will enable the society to move forward and bridge the gap created by the three decades long war.

Teachers' professional development is the key mechanism for the enhancement of classroom teaching and learning and student achievement (Ball and Cohen, 1999; Cohen and Hill, 2000). The Report

'Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement' mentions that professional development influences student achievement through three steps. First, professional development improves knowledge and skills of teachers. Second, enhanced knowledge and skills improve classroom teaching. Third, improved teaching elevates student achievement (Yoon *et al.*, 2007). If there is a malfunction in one link, student learning cannot happen as society expected. If a teacher fails to apply new and innovative ideas from professional development practices to classroom instruction, students will not be able to benefit from the teacher's professional development activities. The study on school based teacher development programmes points out that in general, schools do not have the ability to identify student learning achievements through a school based system (Silva *et al.*, 2007).

According to the situated learning approach, knowledge and skills are learned in the contexts that reflect how knowledge is obtained and applied in day to day situations. Situated cognition theory describes learning as a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than the action of individual acquiring general information from a de-contextualized



body of knowledge (Kirschner and Whitson, 1997). In the post war context, school principals need to consider the social condition of the Jaffna district and need to organize school based teacher development activities to fulfil the needs of the society through the teachers as agents of social change.

The main objective of this study is to identify the opportunities and explore the challenges faced by teachers in Jaffna district when they engage in school based teacher development activities effectively. The study focused on four specific objectives:

1. To examine to what extent teachers in Jaffna district aspire to their professional advancement;
2. To evaluate the extent to which the school-based teacher development activities satisfy the professional development needs of teachers in Jaffna district;
3. To identify the challenges encountered by the teachers in Jaffna district when engaging in school-based teacher development activities; and
4. To make recommendations to overcome the challenges when organizing school based professional development activities

2 METHODOLOGY

A Quantitative research approach was used in this study within a framework of survey research design. The population for the study was the teachers who are teaching in Jaffna district. Out of 7643 teachers, two hundred teachers were selected as the sample. The data were collected using questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on collecting data on three identified key areas namely (i) professional development aspiration (ii) what extent the school based teacher development activities satisfy the professional development needs (iii)

challenges encountered by the teachers in engaging in school based teacher development activities. 103 teachers returned their completed questionnaires. The data obtained were tabulated and analyzed by applying elementary quantitative techniques such as frequencies and percentages.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the 103 respondents 27 are male and 76 are female and 67% of the teachers are graduates. The majority of the teachers (83%) teach at rural schools and 97% of the teachers have more than 5 years of teaching experience.

3.1 Professional Development Aspiration

The following data were collected when teachers were asked to indicate the roles which they aspire to perform for their professional advancement:

As shown in Table 1, the findings revealed that the majority of the teachers in Jaffna districts show their aspiration to perform their role as facilitator to support students' learning and at the same time they expressed their willingness to perform their roles as guide, moral builder, social developer and builder of the values of the society. These findings indicate that teachers realize the importance of their role to guide and facilitate student learning and to develop moralities and values among the children in their region in a post war context. However, they rated administrator role as the least aspired one. The reason for this may be that they feel educational administration is a difficult task in such unrest situations.



Table 1: Roles the teachers aspire to play

Roles	To a Great Extent		Some Extent		Moderate		Least Extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Facilitator for Learning	50	48.5	47	45.6	06	05.8	-	-
Guide	42	40.7	53	51.4	08	07.8	-	-
Counsellor	28	27.2	57	55.3	18	17.5	-	-
Educational Administrator	11	10.7	42	40.7	41	39.8	09	8.73
Moral builder	53	51.4	42	40.7	11	10.7	-	-
Social developer	51	49.5	38	36.9	10	09.8	01	0.97
Builder the social values	45	43.5	47	45.6	11	10.7	-	-

3.2 Teachers’ satisfaction on school based teacher development activities

The following indications were given to identify to what extent school based teacher development activities satisfy the professional development needs of the teachers in Jaffna district.

Table 2 clearly shows that the majority of the teachers mentioned that the way activities conducted under the school based teacher development satisfied their

professional development needs to some extent and moderately. But it is noted that a considerable number of teachers expressed that the activities satisfied their needs to a least extent. More than 20% of them indicated that experts were not invited to help to update their knowledge and arrangements were not made to share the experiences and documents. Therefore, the results revealed that the school based teacher development activities did not fully satisfy their professional development needs.

Table 2: School based teacher development activities satisfy the professional development needs of teachers

Indications	To a Great Extent		Some Extent		Moderate		Least Extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Identifying professional development needs timely	18	17.5	50	48.5	22	21.3	08	07.8
Formulating appropriate plans for professional development considering the social needs	11	10.7	36	34.9	42	40.7	11	10.7
Helping to carry out the plan successfully	13	17.5	41	39.8	36	34.9	09	08.7
Giving enough attention to the project which help to develop professional skills based on the present and future needs	16	15.5	39	37.8	33	32.0	09	08.7
Motivating activities related to teacher education	13	12.6	34	33.0	32	31.0	15	14.5
Inviting experts to help update knowledge	08	07.8	39	37.8	29	28.1	20	19.4
Creating opportunities to involve in innovative activities	12	11.6	31	30.1	43	41.7	12	11.6



Giving opportunities to participate educational conferences	15	14.5	26	25.2	38	36.9	19	18.4
Motivating to conduct action research	13	12.6	33	32.0	34	33.0	15	14.5
Implementing professional development activities effectively	10	09.7	43	41.7	35	34.0	06	05.8
Formulating peer groups among teachers for peer learning	17	16.5	39	37.8	26	25.2	16	15.5
Allocating a specific time to share the experiences of professional development activities	11	10.7	37	35.9	33	32.0	15	14.5
Organizing professional development workshops	16	15.5	39	37.8	25	24.2	18	17.5
Making arrangements to share the experiences and documents received from workshops	09	08.7	40	38.8	25	24.2	22	21.3

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3.3 Challenges encountered by the teachers when they engage in school based teacher development activities

The following statements were given to identify to what extent the teachers encountered challenges when they engage in school based teacher development activities.

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the teachers indicated that they faced

challenges when they engage in school based teacher development activities effectively. More than 50 % of the teachers agreed to a great extent that the funds allocated for school based teacher development was not enough and scholarship facilities were also not available for them. More than 40% of them agreed to a great extent or to some extent that the activities did not identify the present needs of school as well as society, found difficulties in identifying suitable resource persons and not ready to change traditional approaches. Only a very low number of teachers mentioned that they did not face any challenges. More than 20% of them least agreed with some statements and said that they received enough support and guidance, activities are conducted in a proper way, have cooperative attitudes among the peers and shared knowledge and experiences and respected the advice and guidance of experienced teachers. This showed that those teachers need a more supportive environment and the way activities are conducted should be related to the present needs of the school community and society.



Table3: Challenges encountered when engaging in school based teacher development activities effectively

Indications	To a Great Extent		Some Extent		Moderate		Least Extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not identifying present needs of the school community	21	20.4	33	32.0	21	20.4	16	15.5
Not identifying present needs of the society	17	16.5	28	27.2	31	30.1	19	18.4
No enough guidance and support	14	13.6	19	18.4	29	28.1	25	24.2
Activities are not conducting in a proper way	16	15.5	21	20.4	28	27.2	29	28.1
Enough funds are not allocated	54	52.4	17	16.5	09	08.7	14	13.6
Problems in identifying suitable resource persons	27	26.2	18	17.5	29	28.1	16	15.5
No any scholarship facilities for teacher development	54	52.4	22	21.3	11	10.7	09	08.7
Not having enough positive attitudes to share the experiences and knowledge	08	07.8	24	23.3	24	23.3	33	32.0
Having cooperative attitudes among peers	16	15.5	18	17.5	29	28.1	32	31.0
Not respecting experienced teachers advice and guidance	14	13.6	19	18.4	32	31.0	29	28.1
Not willing to change accepted traditional approaches	38	36.9	21	20.4	24	23.3	11	10.7

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that in the post –war context;

1. Teachers in Jaffna district have aspired to play their professional roles as moral developers and social developers to a great extent.
2. Only 51% of the teachers have showed their willingness to perform as school administrators.
3. A considerable number of teachers (from 8% to 21%) in Jaffna district showed their satisfaction to a least extent about the way activities conducted under the school based teacher development.
4. The majority of the teachers have faced challenges when they engaged in school based teacher development activities effectively.

Teachers in Jaffna district faced many problems in their professional development due to internal situation. Now they aspire to perform their roles towards moral and social development. Therefore, this study suggests that the officers those who organize school based teacher development activities should consider the present needs of the school and society and should address them through such activities.

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